

December 19, 1834.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE.

[Continued from the fourth page.]

had been reported, by the Committees of Internal Improvement, hills containing appropriate objects, exclusive of those for the Cumberland road, and for harbors and light-houses, to the amount of about one hundred and million dollars. In this amount was included an article in the State of New-Hampshire, to extend, and the residue was principally for the direct construction of roads by this government. In addition to these projects, which had been presented to the two Houses, under the sanction and recommendation of their respective committees on Internal Improvement, there were then still pending before the committees, and in memorials to Congress, presented, but not referred, different projects for works of a similar character, the expense of which cannot be estimated with certainty, but must have exceeded one hundred millions of dollars.

Regarding the bill authorizing a subscription to the stock of the Massachusetts Lexington Turnpike Company as the entering wedge of a system, which however weak at first might soon become strong enough to rive the bands of the Union asunder, and to subvert its passage was acquiesced in by the Executive and the People; there would no longer be any limitation upon the authority of the General Government in respect to the appropriation of money for such objects. I deem it an imperative duty to withhold from it the Executive approval. Although, from the obviously local character of that work, I might well have contented myself with a refusal to approve the bill upon that ground, yet, sensible of the vital importance of the subject and anxious that my views and opinions in regard to the whole matter should be known to Congress and my constituents, I set it my duty to do so. I therefore embraced that early occasion to apprise Congress that, in my opinion, the Constitution did not confer upon it the power to authorize the construction of ordinary roads and canals within the limits of a State, and to say specifically, that no bill admitting such a power could receive my official sanction. I did so in the confident expectation that the speedy settlement of the public mind upon the whole subject would be greatly facilitated by the difference between the two Houses and myself, and that the harmonious action of the several Departments of the Federal Government in regard to it, would be ultimately secured.

So far at least as it regards this branch of the subject, I have realized. Not only four years have elapsed, and several attempts of a similar nature have intervened, and no attempt, within my recollection, has been made to induce Congress to exercise this power. The applications for the construction of roads and canals, which were formerly multiplied upon your files, are no longer presented; and we have good reason to infer that the current of public sentiment has become so decided against the pretensions as effectually to discourage its re-assertion. So thinking, I derive the greatest satisfaction from the conviction, that thus at least has been secured upon this important and embarrassing subject.

From attempts to appropriate the national funds to objects which, in their local character, we cannot, I trust, have anything but a just apprehension. My views in regard to the expediency of appropriating for works which are claimed to be of a national character, and prosecuted under State authority, assuming that Congress have the right to do so, were stated in my annual message to Congress in 1830, and also in that containing my objections to the Mayville Road Bill.

So thoroughly convinced am I that no such appropriations ought to be made by Congress until a suitable constitutional provision is made upon the subject, and so essential do I regard the point to the highest interests of our country, that I could not consider myself as discharging my duty to my constituents in giving the Executive authority to any bill containing such an appropriation. If the people of the United States desire that the public treasury shall be resorted to for the means to prosecute such works, they will concur in an amendment of the constitution, prescribing a rule by which the national character of the works is to be tested, and by which the greatest practicable equality of benefit may be secured to each member of the confederacy. The effects of such a regulation would be most salutary in preventing unprofitable expenditures, in securing our legislation from the pernicious consequences of a scramble for the favors of Government, and in repressing the spirit of discontent, which most inevitably arises from an unequal distribution of treasures which belong alike to all.

There is another class of appropriations for what may be called, without impropriety, local improvements, which are always considered as standing on a different ground from those to which I have referred. I allude to such as have for their object the improvement of our harbors, the removal of partial and temporary obstructions in our navigable rivers, for the facility and security of our foreign commerce. The grounds upon which I distinguish appropriations of this character from others have already been stated to Congress. I will now only add that at the first session of Congress under the new Constitution, it was provided by law, that all expenses which should accrue from and after the 15th day of August, 1789, in the necessary support and maintenance and repairs of all light-houses, beacons, buoys, and public piers, erected, placed, or sunk before the passage of the act, within any bay, inlet, harbor, or port of the United States, rendering the navigation thereof safe and easy, should be defrayed by the treasury of the United States; and further, that it should be the duty of the Secretary of the Treasury to provide by contracts, with approbation of the President, for rebuilding when necessary and keeping in good repair the light-houses, beacons, buoys, and public piers in the several States, and for furnishing them with supplies. Appropriations for similar objects have been continued from that time to the present without interruption or dispute.

As a natural consequence of the increase and extension of our foreign commerce, ports of entry and delivery have been multiplied and established, not only upon our sea-board, but in the interior of the country, upon our lakes and navigable rivers. The convenience and safety of this commerce have led to the gradual extension of these expenditures; to the erection of light-houses, beacons, buoys, and piers, and to the removal of partial and temporary obstructions in our navigable rivers, and in the harbors upon our great lakes, as well as on the sea-board. Although I have expressed to Congress my apprehension that these expenditures have sometimes been extravagant and disproportionate to the advantages to be derived from them, I have not felt it to be my duty to oppose my bill to bills containing them, and have contented myself to follow in this respect in the footsteps of my predecessors. Sensible, however, from experience and observation, of the great abuses to which the unrestricted exercise of this authority by Congress was exposed, I have prescribed a limitation for the government of my own conduct, by which expenditures of this character are to be restricted to the amount of the entry and debt established by law. I am very sensible that this restriction is not as satisfactory as could be desired, and that much embarrassment may be caused to the Executive Department in its execution, by appropriations for remote and not well understood objects. But as neither my own reflections, nor the lights which I may properly derive from other sources, have supplied me with a better, I shall continue to apply my best exertions to a faithful application of the rule upon which it is founded. I sincerely regret that I could not give my assent to the bill entitled "An act to improve the navigation of the Wabash river;" but I could not have done so without receding from the ground which I have, upon the fullest consideration, taken upon this subject, and of which Congress has been heretofore apprised, and without throwing the subject again open to abuse which no good citizen, entertaining my opinions, could desire.

I rely upon the candor and intelligence of my fellow citizens, whose good indulgence I have already so largely partaken for a correct appreciation of my views in this respect, as I have done on this, and other occasions, checks to a course of legislation which, without, in the slightest degree, calling in question the motives of others, I consider as sanctioning improper and unconstitutional expenditure of public treasure.

I am not hostile to internal improvements, and wish to see them extended to every part of the country. But I am fully persuaded, if they are not commenced in a proper manner, and conducted under an authority generally conceded to be rightful, that a successful prosecution of them cannot be reasonably expected. The attempt will meet with resistance, where it might otherwise receive support, and instead of strengthening the bonds of our confederacy, it will only multiply and aggravate the causes of disunion.

ANDREW JACKSON.

December 1, 1834.

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